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Comparative-Religion Notes.

Chinese Ancestral Worship and Its Significance.—In the Journal of the Transactions of the Victorian Institute Vol. XXVIII. is reproduced a paper read by Surgeon General Gordon before the Institute on *Chinese Ethics and Philosophy* which touches on ancestral worship. He says, "Even to a stranger there is something in the ceremonies which is calculated to attract respectful attention, nor can the foreign onlooker avoid a hope that the merits of the ancestors so honored were such in life as to deserve the veneration so manifested at the tombs and temples dedicated to their memory. As to the actuating sentiment of which the observances in question are the outcome, it seems to me akin to that which in western lands puts expression in monuments such as ornament cathedrals and churches, and in more humble manner strews periodically with flowers the graves of those whom we had loved."

In his remarks on the paper, in the discussion that followed, the eminent scholar and administrator, Sir Thomas F. Wade declared, "I have never been able to regard the worship of ancestors as a rite to be summarily put down. I do not regard it as an idolatrous rite. The tombs are repaired twice a year; in the spring and autumn. A tablet, it is true, is exhibited with a number of characters on it; but there is no image and no image worship. There are offerings set by the dead and incense burned, but I do not think the origin of that worship is to be explained otherwise than by the prescription which Confucius himself obeyed and inculcated, viz., that you shall serve the parent, dead, as though he were living. . . . I do not think it worth while, therefore for missionaries to attack, headlong, that question of ancestral worship. I think we must extend to it very much the same tolerance that St. Paul enjoined upon the early Christians in the case of the Jews in respect of the ceremonies which they had been brought up to observe, and which they were, for the time, unwilling to put away."

These views found opponents. Archdeacon A. E. Moule said, "The author is I believe, right as to the original *sentiment* which gave birth to ancestral worship, it is not right in implying, as he seems to imply, that modern observances coincide with ancient sentiment. Modern observance *do*, I fear, involve *worship*. I have pleaded the desirability of substituting some Christian memorial rite for the Chinese church, which may preserve the sentiment and avoid superstitious observance." Mr. T. A. Barber, a teacher in a Chinese high school, declared that while "it is only fair to recognize the kinship to western care for the memorials of the dead, it should not be forgotten that in practical life the outcome is the slavery of the living to the dead, and a childish perpetual haunting fear of ghosts. . . . Prayers *to* the dead are frequent."

Rev. R. C. Forsyth said that "as a Christian missionary who had labored in the interior of China for over eight years, I cannot agree that this ceremony is harmless. . . . In one mission we have endeavored to substitute for the idolatrous worship a Christian service of thanksgiving and praise." He referred to what Dr. Williams in his *Middle Kingdom* (Vol. II., p. 239) wrote: "The fact that filial piety in the system has overpassed the limit set by God in his Word, and that deceased parents are worshiped as gods by their children is both true and sad. That the worship rendered to their ancestors by the Chinese is idolatrous cannot be doubted; and it forms one of the subtlest phases of idolatry—essentially evil with the guise of goodness—ever established among men."

The Babylonian-Assyrian Religion.—The religion of the Babylonians and Assyrians has a more than ordinary interest for students of the Old Testament because of the close relation between the history of these peoples and that of Israel, and the likenesses between their traditions of the primitive world, creation, the deluge, etc. There is a vast religious literature of Babylonia on which students have as yet scarce made an impression. The language of these inscriptions is difficult, often unintelligible, and problems respecting origins and relations of religions and gods arise at every step. But progress is slowly being made. Specialists in Assyriology are specializing yet more narrowly on these texts. Professor J. A. Craig of the University of Michigan, has just completed a series of Assyrian and Babylonian religious texts, chiefly hymns, prayers, oracles, etc., from the Kouyunjik collection in the British Museum. The first part of this work will contain, on 83 autographed pages, the cuneiform texts, together with a preface and a table of contents. Vol. II. which, we understand, will follow in the course of next year, will supply a full translation, English translation, a short commentary and glossary; additional texts will also be appended. Dr. Tallquist has already published a series of texts of formulæ and conjurations called the Maqlû-texts. "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Assyrisch-babylonischen Religion" will be the title of a new volume of the *Assyriologische Bibliothek*," the first part of which is on the eve of publication. Professor Zimmern of Leipzig will therein give a large number of hitherto unpublished cuneiform texts from the Royal Library at Nineveh, preserved in the British Museum. The first installment will contain the texts of the so-called Shurpû-Series, and in addition to them a full transliteration and translation, short commentary and a vocabulary. And now "The Prayers of the Lifting of the Hand," being the cuneiform text of a group of Babylonian and Assyrian incantations and formulæ from the Tablets of the Kouyunjik Collection, preserved in the British Museum, edited with transliteration, translations, notes and full vocabulary, by Leonard W. King, M.A., of the British Museum, is announced by Messrs. Luzac & Co. Professor Morris Jastrow, Jr., announces the publication of his *Religions of Babylonia and Assyria*, in the series of "Handbooks on the History of Religions," sometime during the present year.